Big Creek Analysis Area
Environmental Assessment

Myrtlewood Resource Area

Coos Bay District

EA Number OR 128-98-11

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Analysis File - available at the Coos Bay District Office

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to implement forest management activities in the Big Creek Analysis Area. The analysis area is approximately 28 miles southeast of Coos Bay, Oregon near the town of Bridge. It includes the Big Creek, Brownson Creek, Fall Creek, Bear Pen Creek, Axe Creek, and Jones Creek drainages that are tributary to Middle Fork Coquille River. The total analysis area is 16,661 acres in size. The BLM manages 9,021 acres (54%) of the analysis area; the Coquille Tribal Forest manages 1,047 acres (6%), and the remaining lands are private. The proposed harvest activities are located in T28S-R10W, T29S-R10W, and T29S-R11W; Willamette Meridian of Coos County.

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to analyze the effects of harvesting timber from this analysis area and actions associated with the timber sales. The proposed actions would contribute to the District's decadal Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ).

The Proposed Action includes: 239 acres of regeneration harvest, 245 acres of commercial thinning, and 14 acres of hardwood/brush conversion in the General Forest Management Area (GFMA); 110 acres of regeneration harvest, 11 acres of density management thinning, and 14 acres of hardwood conversion in Connectivity[1]. The commercial thinning (GFMA) and density management thinning in Connectivity acreage includes 90 acres of density management in the Riparian Reserves. Planned harvest systems include ground-based and skyline yarding. The proposed projects would include 2.0 miles of semi-permanent[2] road construction (all of which would be decommissioned or fully decommissioned after harvest), 14.1 miles of road renovation, 0.9 miles of road improvement, 0.2 miles of designated skid road, and closure of 10.6 miles of existing roads. The proposed projects could be accomplished by timber sale contracts sold in Fiscal Year (FY) 1999, FY 2000, and FY 2001.

Areas considered for timber harvest are outside of Murrelet Reserves and other Late Successional Reserves (LSRs).

This EA is tiered to the *Final - Coos Bay District Proposed Resource Management Plan*, (FRMP, BLM, 1994), which is in conformance with the *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Habitat for the Late Successional and Old Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* and its Record of Decision (ROD), (Northwest Forest Plan, Interagency, 1994). It is also tiered to the *Environmental Assessment to Change the Schedule for Survey and Manage and Protection Buffer Species* (S&M EA), (see BLM Instruction Memo No. OR-99-047).

This EA incorporates by reference the *Port-Orford-Cedar Management Guidelines* (BLM 1994)(detailed evaluation is contained in Section L of the Analysis File); the *Western Oregon*

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[1] Connectivity is a land use allocation within Matrix, managed on a 150-year area control rotation.

[2] Newly constructed roads decommissioned within one year after completion of timber sale activities associated with the harvest unit they were built to access.

Program - Management of Competing Vegetation, (FEIS, BLM 1989); the *Western Oregon Transportation Management Plan* (BLM 1996); and the *Big Creek Watershed Analysis* (BLM 1997). Actions described in this EA are in conformance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) Objectives listed on page B-11 and the Standards and Guidelines for Riparian Reserves on pages C-31 to C-37 of the Northwest Forest Plan. A detailed analysis of the consistency of the action alternatives with the ACS is contained in Section K of the Analysis File. These documents are available for review at the Coos Bay District Office of the BLM, North Bend, Oregon.

The actions proposed in this EA are consistent with Oregon's Coastal Salmon Restoration Initiative (CSRI), the Coquille Watershed Association Action Plan (CWAAP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's September 22, 1998 Biological Opinion on FY1999-2000 timber sales, and the National Marine Fisheries Service's March 18, 1997 Biological Opinion and Conference Opinion on programmatic activities covered in the Coos Bay District's FRMP.

The Analysis File contains additional information used by the interdisciplinary team (IDT) to analyze impacts and alternatives and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Scoping

The scoping process identified the agency and public concerns relating to the proposed projects and defined the issues and alternatives that would be examined in detail in the EA. The general public was informed of the planned EA through letters to those on the Resource Area's mailing list, those receiving the Coos Bay *Planning Update*, and through the District's Internet site. The scoping letter, mailing list, and public responses are in Section A of the Analysis File.

Scoping by the IDT identified four issues.

Identified Issues

1. Landscape Pattern

   Key Indicators: Late-successional forest characteristics
   Habitat connections

2. Contribute to the District's Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ)[3]

   Key Indicators: Estimated timber volume (thousand board feet)
   Estimated timber volume from Connectivity (thousand board feet)

[3] The ASQ would contribute to the decadal ASQ for the District. This is not intended to be the ASQ that would be sustained in the analysis area for future decades.

3. Riparian Reserve Functions

   Key Indicators: Large woody debris (LWD) recruitment potential
   Riparian Reserve species

4. Roads

   Key Indicators: Open road density
   Impacts to resources

Management Objectives

- Commercially thin GFMA stands to enhance growth rates, maintain good crown ratios, manage species composition, capture mortality of small trees, and produce larger, more valuable logs for the future.

- Conduct density management thinnings in Connectivity and Riparian Reserves to accelerate growth of trees which would later provide large-diameter snags and down logs, promote the development of understory vegetation, harvest mortality of small trees as the stand develops, maintain good crown ratios, and manage species composition. Density management thinnings in Connectivity would also produce larger, more valuable logs for the future.

- Maintain or enhance resource values within Riparian Reserves to meet the ACS objectives.

- Manage BLM-controlled road systems through various types of road closures and decommissioning to maintain or improve wildlife habitats, water quality, and hydrologic function. Reduce the open road density in accordance with the Transportation Management Objectives on BLM-managed lands in the proposed action area.

- Contribute to the District's decadal ASQ volume commitment. Address socio-economic commitment by promoting the production of merchantable timber through multiple timber sales from GFMA.

- Maintain legacy components in GFMA regeneration harvest units through retention of green trees, snags, and coarse wood.

- Limit spread of Port-Orford-cedar (POC) root rot disease (*Phytophthora lateralis* - PL) in the high risk areas (adjacent to roads and in riparian areas) and maintain POC as a species in low risk areas.

- Re-establish conifer stands on sites where hardwoods or brush became established following previous harvest of conifer.

Issues Identified and Analyzed then Eliminated from Further Consideration:

Fisheries
Survey and Manage Species
Special Status Species
Water Quality limited 303(d) streams (summer temperature)
Natural Disturbance Patterns
Fragmentation/Interior Habitats
Port-Orford-Cedar Population Viability
Sediment Delivery

Reasons for elimination are included in Section B of the Analysis File.

Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From This Action

The Big Creek Watershed Analysis identified approximately 989 acres of potential regeneration harvest and 277 acres of potential commercial thinning within GFMA. Potential regeneration harvest units consisted of stands over 60 years of age (based on Forest Operation Inventory data) that were outside of any known Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species sites, Riparian Reserves, LSR, and Timber Productivity Capability Classification (TPCC). Since the Big Creek Watershed Analysis, several potential harvest units identified as murrelet occupied sites were eliminated from any further consideration.

The ID team identified 41 potential harvest units to consider which included: regeneration harvest and commercial thinning units in the GFMA identified in the watershed analysis, commercial thinning units identified since watershed analysis was completed, regeneration harvest units in Connectivity, and density management thinning units in Connectivity. Density management thinning units in Connectivity consisted of stands 35-50 years of age that were of a composition and density that would benefit from thinning. A map of the units not included in the action alternatives, and rationale for their elimination, can be found in Section C of the Analysis File.

Of the 41 potential harvest units, portions of some regeneration harvest units were eliminated from consideration due to presence of previously unidentified streams. In addition, some potential commercial thinning and density management thinning in Connectivity units (or portions of units) were eliminated because their current stocking levels did not justify thinning.

No units identified in the Big Creek Watershed Analysis as Priority 3 are proposed for harvest (EA Units 1, 13, 13a, 14, 14a, 15, 16, 17, and 18). The primary reason for excluding these units was to minimize fragmentation in stands offering substantial interior forest habitat for wildlife. Also, road construction associated with harvesting these units could involve longer, permanent roads across streams which are currently unroaded.

Vicinity Map

Big Creek
Analysis Area EA

Myrtlewood Resource Area
Coos Bay District BLM